

Life Group Questions

June 9th, 2024

The Example of an Apostle – Pastor Ray Harms-Wiebe – [Romans 15:14-21](#)

Note from Pastor Jonathan

Hey Life Groups,

I want to remind leaders to let Rufina know when your group will be winding down for the summer and your plans. Let me know if you have anything unique!

Also, Love Our City is coming soon! It's an amazing chance for us to make an impact in our community. You can serve at a crisis pregnancy centre, House of Omeed (Persian refugee ministry), Inner Hope (lower income and minority youth and families), Willingdon House (refugees), or clean our church so it will be more welcoming to visitors. Don't worry, Pastor Vinh won't be swinging around a chainsaw as far as I know. Check out the page for more details: <https://willingdon.org/events/love-our-city/>. Some eagle-eyed people have noticed I'm in the Love Our City photo in the café from 2019.

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QUESTIONS (Pick any you like.)

1. What is the purpose of Paul's reminders?

Paul wrote a lot to the Christians in Rome. He isn't writing a theological treatise as an academic exercise. Many Christians often treat the Bible as nothing more than knowledge. You may know Christians who have studied for decades, but never put their knowledge into practice.

Paul says he's written to the Roman Church about certain topics so that their "offerings ... may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit." Back in Romans 12, Paul wrote "to present [our] bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Romans 12:1).

We can see the same three points reiterated.

Offering/Sacrifice. We usually associate sacrifice and offerings in Old Testament (before Jesus) times with animal sacrifices at the temple. While that's correct, God has always cared more about the heart.

Hosea 6:6

For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,
the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.

God calls out people many times for offering animal sacrifices, while ignoring bigger issues (e.g., Proverbs 21:3; Isaiah 1:11-17).

Jesus calls out the religious leaders for being wrongly meticulous about their sacrifices. Some teachers during Jesus' time taught that people had to tithe (give 10% of) their dill.

Avodah Zarah 7b:11 — It is taught ... that Nahum the Mede says: The dill plant is subject to tithes, whether it is used as a seed, or a vegetable, or a pod. ... As we learned in a mishna that Rabbi Eliezer says: The dill plant is subject to tithes whether it is used as a seed, or a vegetable, or a pod.

Unless you eat crazy amounts of dill or you're a wedding florist making mint bouquets (<https://sg.news.yahoo.com/style/herb-bouquets-newest-wedding-trend-090500028.html>), how much would be tithed? Imagine someone taking a few pieces of herbs to the temple to sacrifice. What a waste of everyone's time.

Matthew 23:23–24 — "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel!"

Romans 15:14–21

¹⁴ I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another.

¹⁵ But on some points I have written to you very boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God ¹⁶ to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

¹⁷ In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God. ¹⁸ For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, ¹⁹ by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ; ²⁰ and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation, ²¹ but as it is written,

"Those who have never been told of him will see, and those who have never heard will understand."

The religious leaders focused so much on tiny, insignificant things while ignoring what God cared about. They wanted to follow God's laws their way, not God's.

Acceptable. God has always cared more about our hearts and whether we pursue Him and His desires. For the Roman Christians, many fixated on their specific interpretation of worship (for example, abstaining from meat or treating specific days as special) or their freedoms (“I’m free to eat whatever I want, even if it offends my church family.”). By judging or behaving in ways that caused others to stumble, the lives they offered didn’t honor God. God wants His people to love each other, so Paul tells what kind of lives God wants from them in Romans 12 to 14.

Holy. Sanctified (ἁγιαζω) means to be made holy (ἅγιος). I don’t like how sanctified sounds unrelated to **holy**. I wish there was a verb like “**holify/holyfied**”. Holy means to be set apart and different. God wants our lives to be set apart and different from how the world lives. God used parts of the temple to be example of holiness. There were items that might be considered mundane (like lampstands, tongs, and more), but they were only used for temple worship and nothing else. God wants our lives to be dedicated to worshiping Him and nothing else.

The Roman Christians judged others who aren’t as good as them or abused their freedoms for their pleasure. They acted like how non-believers behaved, but God wanted them to be unique.

We know that we are naturally unable to be different from the world because we’re human. We have the same tendencies to rebel against God or be self-seeking. Although we can curb some of our sinful tendencies, we can never fully stop them. I’m sure many of you have realized that you can’t change yourself, no matter how hard you try. It doesn’t matter how many self-help books you read or how much you rise and grind. You’re stuck.

Praise God that He gives us the Holy Spirit to do the hard work for us. As we submit to the Holy Spirit, He shapes us to be more like Jesus and makes our lives acceptable to God. I am so thankful that I don’t need to change myself because I know it’s impossible.

2. What do we need to instruct one another?

Some of us think we need formal theological training or God’s revelation to teach. Paul had both (Acts 9:15; 22:3), but that’s not necessary for everyone. Paul tells the Christians in Rome that they are filled with **goodness** and **knowledge** to **instruct one another**.

Goodness. Goodness is ἀγαθωσύνη (agathōsynē), meaning “positive moral quality characterized esp. by interest in the welfare of others” (BDAG). Yes, they aren’t perfect, but they ultimately care about each other. They just needed to learn how to care better.

It’s important for teaching that the one teaching genuinely cares about who they’re teaching. I’ve taught and seen teachers who teach for the wrong reasons. Some teach to feel smart, often teaching something complicated and deep, but completely irrelevant to their students’ lives or refusing to bring it down to their level. Some teachers criticize their students for not picking up what they’re putting down, while others teach because ... well, someone’s got to teach seventh graders.

So, if you genuinely care about other people, you are on your way to teaching.

Knowledge. We need knowledge to teach, otherwise, what are we teaching? That doesn’t mean we must have a doctorate degree like Pastor Bryan. As we learn and experience God, we pass on what we’re learning. We can teach as we learn.

We can tell others what we learned in the sermon, set an example (1 Timothy 4:12), teach spiritually younger people, or share what God is doing in our lives with our Life Group.

I also want to add that we must continually grow in knowledge. It's not about knowing everything about God, because He's infinite! We want to continuously learn more about Him. Once we think we know everything, we stop pursuing God. I have to admit I was kind of like that after seminary. I thought I had more than enough knowledge, so I stopped learning and just taught. Howard Hendricks was a beloved professor at my seminary and one of his best quotes was, "If we stop learning today, we stop teaching tomorrow."

3. What kinds of reminders do you think Paul would write to your Life Group?

We've covered a lot since Romans 12. As you look back at these chapters, what do you think Paul would want your group to know? Are there any areas the people in your Life Group have excelled at? Celebrate it because Paul would. Are there any areas you need to work on? Ask God's help, because God wants to help.